

Chocolate Strawberry by HashtagLEH

Series: Something Like a Family [14]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Awesome Robin Buckley, Background Neil Hargrove, Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield Have a Good Relationship, Billy Hargrove Has a Crush on Steve Harrington, Billy Yearns™, Bisexual Steve Harrington, Communication, Finally, Gay Billy Hargrove, Getting Together, Kissing, Kissing in the Rain, Lesbian Robin Buckley, M/M, Matchmaker Robin Buckley, Maxine "Max" Mayfield Ships It, Neil Hargrove is His Own Warning, Neil Hargrove's A+ Parenting, Period-Typical Homophobia, Recreational Drug Use, Resolved Sexual Tension, Robin Buckley & Billy Hargrove Friendship, Robin ships it, Steve Harrington Has a Crush on Billy Hargrove, because by this point I have no patience for anything else, he's super dramatic about it too, it's just weed

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Summary:

"Of course Steve was looking at me," Billy sighed, answering Max's comment. "We were *talking*."

"I didn't say he was looking, I said he was *staring*," Max said smugly. She leaned back in her seat with a satisfied sort of air, like she was settling in to tell him all the ways she knew she was right. "You were looking out at Mrs. Dowell's car when she drove by, and probably

saying something stupid, based on the look on your face, and Steve was looking at you with hearts in his eyes. It was *gross*. But also really sweet. Why aren't you guys sucking face yet?"

Billy tossed her a suspicious glare. "Have you been talking with Robin?" he demanded.

"I haven't even met her yet," Max reminded him. "But I think we would get along *great*."

Billy shuddered at the thought of the two of them together, probably ganging up on him to try wreaking all kinds of havoc. It would be a *nightmare*.

Chocolate Strawberry

Author's Note:

YOU GUYS IT'S TIME. WE'VE BEEN PREPARING FOR THIS, AND IT'S FINALLY HERE.

When Billy went to school in California, the first day of the semester was the most stressful. This was because at the beginning of the day, they were given a paper that would be their class schedule, and they had to make it to their own class period before it was finalized. There was always a crowd of students rushing to the favorite teachers at the beginning of the day, because they had to try to get an open seat before they were all filled and they were left with the hated teachers. To be sure no one tried to pull a fast one, the teacher had to sign the paper that said yes, they were a part of this class in this period. At the end of the day they returned their papers to the front office, and their schedules were finalized with the school, to be sure they were getting the courses they needed in the year they needed to be completed.

Billy had never run for the classes he wanted – he had an image to maintain, after all. This was how it had happened that he took so many honors and advanced classes, because if he didn't make it to the teacher he wanted, usually the more advanced classes had a better teacher than the other options, and not so many students trying for those. It was in this way that he had managed to avoid Mr. Donovan since his second semester of freshman year, because that guy hated his guts and Billy definitely returned the sentiment.

But in California, the high school was big. With over a thousand students, it was easier for the school officials to leave it up to the individual, with just a secretary to make the files of what was already decided and given to them.

Hawkins was the exact opposite. With barely two hundred students, it was the expected norm that the front office decided on each student's schedule *for* them, so when Billy returned to school after the Christmas break, he was handed a schedule that was already completely filled in.

He almost wished that it was set up like it had been in California, because then he would have been able to at least *try* and get into more classes with Steve. Now it was left up to the hand of fate – or, more specifically, the hand of Cynthia Cornwall, the secretary who had put everyone's schedules together. Billy vaguely wondered when she'd done so, and how long it took to do each student's, but then he saw Steve approaching down the hallway with his own schedule in hand, and the thought fled his mind.

Steve looked good, but then Billy thought Steve always looked good. But he had always liked the way his cream-colored sweaters looked on him, and the jeans perfectly shaped his legs and his ass so that Billy had to constantly pretend he wasn't staring.

"Hey," Steve greeted when he got within speaking distance. "What's your schedule like this semester?"

Billy hadn't even looked at it yet; he pulled it out of his pocket and unfolded it, passing it over to Steve to look at. Steve quirked an eyebrow as he accepted it, probably wondering why Billy hadn't just listed off the classes himself. Billy affected ignorance, because Steve didn't need to know how much Billy was hoping to have classes with him this semester like a teenage boy with a helpless crush (which he definitely was, apparently) and he was trying to play it cool, like he didn't care.

It took only a couple of moments, but it felt like an eternity before Steve said, "Ms. Cornwall forgot to add your math class. You'll need to switch this whole thing around."

"*What?*" Billy barked, snatching the paper from Steve's hand, angry at the inconvenience of having to go get this changed as much as he was hopeful that maybe he could sweet talk the old lady into putting him into the class periods he wanted –

But then he saw his Calculus class slotted into his first period, and he glared at Steve as the other boy started laughing.

"Asshole," Billy huffed, helpless to the way his lips were curving a little into a smile. He shoved Steve in the shoulder, accepted the immediate shove back and ignored the way his stomach fluttered at

the sight of the wrinkles that formed in the corners of Steve's eyes when he smiled.

"We've got English, lunch, and P.E. together," Steve ticked off on his fingers, just as the warning bell rang for them to get to class. "So...I'll see you second period, yeah?"

"Catch you later, pretty boy," Billy agreed, turning to go to the math hallway immediately, resisting the urge to turn back and look at Steve as he walked away.

School was as boring as it ever was, but at least it got Billy out of the house. He was glad to have the classes that he did with Steve, and he was also glad to only have P.E. and lunch with Tommy H, because *Jesus*, he was annoying. Last semester he'd had three classes and lunch with him though, so this term was actually an improvement, at least. He had to grit his teeth any time the guy made some snide comment about Steve though, apparently just not having noticed that Billy was actually *friends* with him. But after Billy made a comment that it was pretty faggy for Tommy to be so obsessed with the former King, complete with a suggestive jerking hand motion, Tommy had considerably toned down the remarks.

Their English teacher was Mrs. Norman, and she was a hardass who told them the first day that the places they were currently sitting in were their new assigned seats for the semester. This wouldn't have been a big deal, except that Jonathan had wanted to chat with him after first period and so by the time Billy had managed to make it class, Steve was already seated and the closest spot to him was in the next row over and two seats behind, in the second to last row from the back.

But it was whatever. It was fine, because he still had lunch with him, and he still had P.E. with him where he could get close enough to him to smell his expensive cologne under the guise of competitive play. It was probably good, even, that he couldn't be so close to Steve as often as he wished, because surely he would catch too many feelings that way, and a little distance could be good for the heart.

He really needed to try getting past his crush on the guy, he reflected.

In an attempt to do this, he asked out one of the girls in English whom he'd noticed staring at him from time to time. Her name was Amanda, and she wore a lot of lip gloss, and he was pretty sure she was in his history class too but he wasn't certain.

They went out that Friday, when Billy would have normally gone to Steve's to hang out, but he'd told him he was busy, that he was going on a date when Steve had pressed, because he needed the distraction from Steve's lips and his hands and his fucking *legs* – not that Billy shared that last part. Steve had looked a little startled, but he'd said he would see him on Saturday then and Billy had responded with a "Yeah, maybe" before he'd beaten a hasty retreat.

And Amanda was nice enough, he supposed. She was actually pretty smart, talked about how she was graduating early after testing out of some classes, and Billy tried to stay engaged but he just kept wishing he was with Steve, watching some shitty movie and drinking shitty beer until he had to return home.

He played the part though, kissed her sultrily on her porch before leaving her breathless as he winked and promised to do this again, maybe when they had more time, and he didn't even really feel bad as he went back to his car with the knowledge that he was never going out with her again.

On Saturday, Billy went over to Steve's house, and tried not to think about the fact that he had more fun in the first half hour with him than he had the whole three hours he'd spent with Amanda the night before.

Steve didn't ask about his date, probably figuring it hadn't gone well after Billy didn't mention it, but honestly Billy just didn't want to talk about dating with Steve right there, looking at him with his chocolate brown eyes like what he said was actually *important* to him.

At church on Sunday – an infrequent expectation of Neil's that they had to always be ready for him to decide it was *important* that they went to church that week – Billy saw a girl he vaguely recognized from school sitting a couple of rows ahead of them. After the service,

he asked her out on a date for that night, which she readily accepted, eyes shining.

Hours later, after he'd gotten her off on his fingers and dropped her off back home, he realized that he'd already forgotten her name. Whatever, he decided. She wasn't that important, anyway.

Neil was pleased when he returned home though, stinking of cheap, obviously feminine perfume, made some comment about how he was glad Billy was getting his head screwed on straight now. Billy nodded in all the right places, and then when Neil let him go, he disappeared to quietly dry heave in the shower.

That Friday, Billy realized suddenly in the middle of English that he had been staring at the back of Steve's head of perfect hair for who knew how long. He snapped his gaze back to his notebook, staring at the blank page he was supposed to have been taking notes on. They were going to start reading *Animal Farm* on Monday, and Mrs. Norman was giving the backgrounder on the book. Billy figured it was good then that he'd already read the book back in California, because he had no idea what the teacher had been saying for the last half hour.

He looked up when he felt someone's gaze on him, and his eyes quickly fell on the girl sitting on the other side of Steve, but on the same row as Billy. He was pretty sure she was in band, and that was the extent of his knowledge on her.

For a moment he thought she was looking at him in the same way every other girl looked at him at this school – with longing, or lust, or some measure of attraction even if they didn't like him. He figured she could be the next girl he could take out to try and distract himself from Steve.

But then her gaze moved from him, to Steve, clearly wondering why he'd been staring at him. A moment later, her eyes widened marginally, and her expression turned into something like realization. Her eyes darted back to him, and the look in them was *knowing*.

Something cold settled in his stomach, heavy like a stone and acidic enough to make bile rise in his suddenly tight throat.

Shit.

Billy wondered how much time he had left, before all of Hawkins knew he was a faggot. There was nothing he could do; if he denied it, it would just validate the rumors. If he kept quiet, people would know there was something to hide. There was no putting this snake back in a can.

He didn't ask any girls out that weekend. Part of him was afraid that they would already know, or that they would find out while he was out with them, if they went somewhere public and a friend tried to warn her away or something. But the greater part of him was afraid that once Steve found out, he would want nothing to do with him. Billy would be cut off from the other boy completely.

So Billy was selfish. He supposed he deserved to be, sometimes. He went to Steve's house after school on Friday, under the guise of doing homework together, and then showed up again Saturday morning to spend the whole day with him shooting the shit. Max clearly noticed that something was *off* about him, but he didn't tell her what he expected to face come Monday. He just spent all the time he could with Steve, thinking that perhaps if he hoarded this time, it would be easier when it was suddenly gone.

Monday morning, he drove Max to school as usual, and she clearly noticed him being weird still and decided she couldn't take it anymore. After only a minute or so of questioning, Billy caved, because it wasn't like any of this was a *secret* to her.

"A girl in my class saw me staring at Steve on Friday," Billy said, trying to keep his tone even but pretty sure he missed the mark, if the alarmed look Max gave him before he even finished the first few words was any indication. "I'm pretty sure she figured out I'm a fag."

"Shit," Max whispered, almost to herself. Then, "We can ditch school. You want to skip? I still have money I got from the poker game – we

can go to the diner. Or farther away, to the mall..."

"No, Max, it's fine," Billy shook his head, feeling a little warm despite his anxiety, because he was struck anew with the realization that he was *damn* lucky to have Max as his sister. As much as she could be an annoying little troll, she cared and was supportive where it counted. "If she told anyone, it'll just be rumors – no one can prove anything. It'll blow over soon."

Max stared at him, biting her lip and eyebrows drawn with worry. "If you need to come get me, *do it*," she said resolutely. "Or, I could spread rumors to counteract these ones. Do you want me to tell people you got a girl pregnant in California, and that's why we're here? That would spread quickly – people would tell their siblings at the high school and no one would believe...!"

Despite himself, Billy couldn't help the laugh that escaped him at Max's planning. "No, no, don't do that," he interrupted. "That might convince people I'm not a homo, but it wouldn't exactly be doing me favors in every other aspect." At her distressed, slightly mutinous look, he sighed and reached over, tugging on a lock of her hair. "I promise it will be fine, Max. I'll just fuck one of the high school girls or something who will go and tell all her friends, and the rumors won't even make it out of the school."

Max didn't look like she believed him, which was pretty valid of her really, because Billy didn't believe his own words, either. This was worse than if the same thing had happened at his school in California. These were small-minded people in a small town in the Midwest; it wouldn't be forgotten about as easily as it would have been back home.

But there was nothing Billy could do, so he just dropped Max off at the middle school before parking in his usual spot at the high school. He smoked a cigarette to try and calm his shaking hands, and only left his car when he heard the late bell ring.

Billy expected whispers and rumors and disgusted looks as soon as he walked through the doors of the high school. There were still

students milling about, grabbing books and supplies from lockers before running to make it to class on time, and perhaps that could have been to blame for the lack of unusual reaction to Billy's entrance.

But the trend continued all through calculus, and he noticed that it was only Jonathan giving him weird looks from two seats over, but that was probably because he knew him enough to notice that Billy was on edge about something and he probably wanted to help somehow.

But Billy didn't want to deal with Jonathan or the sheer amount of *concern* he exuded, and how he would definitely try and press to figure out what was going on with him, so after class he avoided him, out the door before the guy could even leave his seat.

All was normal during passing period, and Billy thus expected it to blow up in his face next period, with the girl who'd noticed right there, and the guy he incidentally had a crush on there, too.

He was one of the first ones in the classroom, which would normally make Billy cringe with horror at being seen as a grind, but he was too antsy for Steve's arrival to care too much about it. He pretended to be doodling in his notebook, but he glanced up every time someone came into the room, certain that one of them was going to comment on a new rumor they'd heard about him being a homo.

But no one paid attention to him, and before he knew it Steve himself was finally coming in, and –

Billy's heart stopped, because the girl – *that girl* – was walking right in with Steve, and they didn't look *especially* familiar with each other, but there was enough friendliness that Billy could only imagine what it was they had been talking about.

The girl made eye contact with him first, and Billy was surprised to note that there didn't seem to be any sort of disgust or maliciousness in her eyes. He wasn't sure what it was her gaze held when she looked at him, but it was almost...*friendly*.

Steve looked up then, and his expression lit up the way Billy realized

was normal whenever the guy saw him, and he didn't know how to take that, so he just silently watched as Steve made his way over, dropping into his seat but turning around so he could talk to Billy.

"There's a pop quiz in history," he told him, because he had history first period, while Billy had it with the same teacher right after lunch. "It wasn't too bad though, so like, don't be alarmed."

Billy wasn't completely aware of what he said back, words just falling from his mouth automatically, but he figured it was some sort of acknowledgement because Steve just nodded in agreement and turned around in his seat as Mrs. Norman called the class to attention. Billy blinked at the back of Steve's head for a moment, admittedly stunned that Steve was acting so...*normal*. Like he *didn't* know that Billy had a big gay crush on him.

With no small measure of confusion, he turned his head to look at Robin (at least, he hoped that was her name, was pretty sure it was), and found her looking right back at him.

Then, almost deliberately she moved her hand through her hair, curling it back around her ear and sending a smile his way. To anyone else, it would have looked flirtatious, a way of getting Billy Hargrove's attention, but to him it was obvious that she was directing his attention to her ear. More specifically, to the single earring dangling from it.

He stared at the pink triangle, mouth falling open slightly. It wasn't huge, was some cheap piece of plastic meant to be trendy, but he suddenly understood. Her smile grew at the look on his face, into something like a smirk, but not a cruel one. Just – *knowing*. Commiserating.

Oh.

Study hall was in the library, and after marking his name off on the attendance he was allowed to roam as he pleased, because the teacher heading the class couldn't care less what they did. It was just a filler period, to keep track of the students when they didn't have

other class requirements. There weren't a lot of students who needed to add it, so the library wasn't crowded or anything for the hour.

It turned out he had study hall with this Robin chick; he was already sitting at one of the tables when he saw her walk in and mark her name off on the attendance roster. He watched her out the corner of his eye, pretending to be focused on the textbook in front of him as she looked around briefly before spotting him and making her way over.

She dropped into the seat across from him without waiting for an invitation, setting her backpack on top of the table, and then prodded his foot with her own to get his attention. He looked up at her like he was bored, raising an eyebrow in question.

"Mrs. Norman is a bitch," she announced, unzipping her backpack. "I had her last term when we were reading *1984*, and she gave me a lower grade on my essay – like, a *whole* letter grade – because it was like, *fifty* words too short. Honestly, that's like three lines, what the hell is up with that?"

Billy stared at the girl for a moment, because she was acting normal and like they were already friends, but he figured whatever, he could play nice.

He leaned back in his chair, dropping his book so that it was laid open on the table. "I had a teacher back in California that was an ex-military lieutenant," he drawled, "So Norman really seems like a peach in comparison."

Billy learned over the next hour of study hall that Robin – which was indeed her name, he confirmed – was actually pretty cool. Bit of a nerd, sure, but she snarked back at him with equal fire, which made her good in his book.

They didn't talk about her realization, or her coming out to him – nothing about them being homos. She just attached herself to him that day and decided they were friends, which Billy didn't really mind as much as he claimed. Robin told him straight out after the second time he insisted they weren't friends that he was full of shit, which honestly just deepened his respect for her.

She ended up joining them at lunch sometimes, when she didn't feel like sitting with her band friends. Apparently she knew Steve already, which wasn't really surprising considering the size of Hawkins, and shared History with him first period, and Steve easily welcomed her at their table. She didn't know Nancy or Jonathan so well, but they were friendly enough with her that it wasn't awkward.

With Robin hanging around so much, Billy almost felt...normal. So much so that he forgot about taking girls on dates, because she was someone who knew his worst secret and still hung around him, so his brain told him that he was fine, that he didn't *really* need to distract himself from Steve. He would never do anything or act on his crush on the guy, but something about Robin made him feel like he was okay to just be himself.

He didn't think about how it looked on the outside, though – not until Steve commented on it.

“So...” Steve drew out when it was just the two of them again, smoking a joint at the quarry. They were sitting in Billy’s car, because it was windy outside and the chill was too much because of it. Steve’s thumb rubbed against the side of his joint in a thoroughly distracting way that Billy tried in vain not to notice. “Are you and Robin a thing now?”

Billy choked on the smoke curling in his lungs, and coughed several times to try and get his breath back. Steve was staring at him when he stopped, because Billy had never choked on weed before with him, too used to the drug to be that impacted by it anymore.

“No,” Billy finally croaked out, and coughed again before inhaling again from his joint to try and clear his throat. Smoke blew out from between his lips as he went on, “No, she’s just a friend.”

Steve was watching him, something in his eyes that Billy couldn’t read. Steve flicked his gaze away a moment later, lifting his joint to his lips again. “Do you *want* to be a thing?”

Billy snorted unwillingly before he shook his head. “Nah, she’s not really my type,” he drawled, and then reached over to pull the lever on his seat to make the back of it drop so that he was lying down

more. A moment later, Steve followed suit on his own seat, and stared up at the ceiling of the car as he took another hit of weed.

“She’s got nice tits,” Steve said almost absently. “And she’s only like, an inch shorter than you so it’s a good height difference. And her freckles are cute.”

Billy pushed away the thought that he himself was an inch shorter than *Steve*, because that was obviously not relevant. And he knew that Robin was lesbian, wouldn’t ever *want* to get with Steve like that, but he still couldn’t help the curl of jealousy at hearing Steve admiring Robin, even on just a superficial level.

But he deflected with, “Sounds to me like *you* want to ask her out.”

“No,” Steve said, just a smidgen too quickly, and Billy’s heart sank even as he kicked himself for it, because he’d already accepted that nothing would ever happen with Steve, but apparently his heart needed to get with the program too then, because *obviously* Steve would get a girlfriend eventually, and then a wife and two and a half kids and a dog, and he would live out his perfect, middle-class life, forgetting about Billy completely as just someone he went to high school with.

He knew he was spiraling quickly, but he couldn’t really stop it, and he lashed out immediately in response.

“Good,” he said shortly in response to Steve’s denial. “I mean, you could try, but I’m pretty sure Robin’s got no interest in the former ‘King Steve.’” And he told himself that he was just warning Steve away from Robin because she genuinely was not attracted to him or any man, but if he was honest with himself he kind of meant it more to hurt, to sting. An obvious dismissal because of who *Steve* was, and not Robin.

He regretted it a moment after he said it, because he didn’t *actually* want to hurt Steve or throw who he used to be back in his face. But there was no way to take it back without revealing certain things about Billy himself, so he stayed quiet and took another hit from his joint, acting like nothing was wrong.

To his surprise, Steve didn't seem offended by Billy's words. He only hummed contemplatively, staring at the ceiling of the car as he exhaled in a plume of smoke.

"Nah, she's not really my type," he said, almost lazily. Billy realized a moment later that it was an exact echo of his own words just a minute ago, but he wasn't sure how to interpret that. The gay part of him wanted to see it as Steve being pointed, trying to tell him that he was a homo too because he didn't have a crush on this obviously hot chick, but he pushed that thought away because hoping did no good. It was probably just Steve mocking him or something, saying Billy was dumb for not thinking Robin was hot without actually saying it. Or it was just a coincidence that Steve was using the same phrasing he had. He didn't know.

So, rather than dealing with it, he changed the subject.

"You're a dumbass," were the words Robin greeted him with as soon as she sat down across from him at what had become their usual table in study hall. He raised an eyebrow at her, keeping his book open in front of him despite not having read a word of it and not really having any intention of doing so either.

"And what have I done now?" Billy drawled as she plopped herself into her chair with a huff.

"It's not what you've *done*, it's what you *haven't* done," Robin replied promptly, leaning forward so that her words were so quiet that only the two of them had even a chance of hearing. "You need to kiss the daylights out of Steve Harrington, get rid of all this UST between you two."

Billy's eyes widened against his will, because obviously Robin knew about his big gay crush on Steve – it was how she'd figured out he was gay in the first place, after all – but still they had never talked about it *out loud* before. Billy had expected the status quo to continue that way, and hadn't said anything about the obvious (at least to him, now that he was looking) crush that she had on Tammy Thompson.

Now that that was apparently gone, he narrowed his eyes at her and hissed back, “*You go kiss Tammy, then.*”

Robin scowled back at him. “*Tammy is straight,*” she hissed, glancing around to be sure no one was nearby, as though Billy hadn’t been doing that as soon as Robin brought up Steve. “*She’s dating Jeremy O’Connell.*”

“No shit,” Billy drawled, still glaring. “*And Steve is straight, so don’t try telling me that I have more of a chance than you do with Tammy.*”

Robin snorted inelegantly. “*That boy is about as straight as an Indiana road,*” she retorted. “*God, you’re so blind it’s frustrating.*”

“*Steve dated Nancy Wheeler for a year,*” Billy insisted, squashing down any hope that rose in him at Robin’s insistence, because he *knew* she was wrong. “*I’m pretty sure I’d know if my best friend was a fag.*”

Robin’s glare went fierce, actually angry for the first time. “*Don’t use that word,*” she snapped, and it took a moment for Billy to realize what she was talking about.

“*A homo, whatever,*” he corrected, because he wasn’t one to apologize and it wasn’t like she’d never heard the word before, so he would just be more careful about not using it in the future.

Robin moaned dramatically, thunking her head on the table a couple of times before looking up at him again. “*Open your eyes,*” she pleaded. “*Do you even realize how much that dingus looks at you? It’s heart eyes to the max; you’re so lucky your crush likes you back.*”

“*Stop being dumb,*” Billy rolled his eyes, and picked up his book again. “*It doesn’t suit you.*”

He was looking down at his book once more, so he didn’t see it, but he heard when Robin’s head thunked to the table again.

“*Steve was staring at you again.*”

Billy looked over at Max briefly before shifting gears to pull out of the arcade lot. It was Tuesday, so she couldn't spend too long there before Neil would get home from work, and he would expect their presence despite the fact that dinner wouldn't be for another hour and a half after that and it wasn't like they spent the time together anyway. But there was still enough time after school that if they were fast, Max could get about forty minutes of time playing arcade games before they had to speed home.

When they first moved here, Billy would've been much less likely to be willing to cart her around, and thus she hadn't been there much – only when he knew that there was much lower risk of getting into it with Neil.

Now though, he was fine speeding over to the arcade right after school, because usually Steve was taking the boys there too, so the two of them could spend the time together, usually just sitting in one of their cars and listening to music, maybe smoking cigarettes. (They saved the weed and alcohol for more secluded locations, where no one was going to call the police on them for underage substance abuse, but no one cared about the seventeen-year-olds smoking some Marlboros.)

Today, it had been a bit warmer – or maybe they just liked to think so, after the long winter months so far – with the sun visible and no breeze to chill through them. So, after the first several minutes of sitting in Steve's BMW, they had migrated to sit on the trunk of the car, backs to the arcade and watching others drive by on the main road while they chatted. Max had been the one to come out to go home rather than Billy looking for her inside, and he'd reluctantly slid off the back of the car to leave. He told Steve he'd see him the next day, and since the boys were still playing inside he told him not to sit out in the cold on his own, before he'd gotten into his own Camaro to leave.

"Of course Steve was looking at me," Billy sighed, answering Max's comment. "We were *talking*."

"I didn't say he was looking, I said he was *staring*," Max said smugly. She leaned back in her seat with a satisfied sort of air, like she was settling in to tell him all the ways she knew she was right. "You were

looking out at Mrs. Dowell's car when she drove by, and probably saying something stupid, based on the look on your face, and Steve was looking at you with hearts in his eyes. It was *gross*. But also really sweet. Why aren't you guys sucking face yet?"

Billy tossed her a suspicious glare. "Have you been talking with Robin?" he demanded.

"I haven't even met her yet," Max reminded him. "But I think we would get along *great*."

Billy shuddered at the thought of the two of them together, probably ganging up on him to try wreaking all kinds of havoc. It would be a *nightmare*.

Of course he'd told Max about Robin the day she had sat across from him at the library – Max had been worried that Billy had been outed all day, after all. He hadn't told Max *everything* – namely, the fact that Robin was lesbian, because that was a secret that she should be allowed to decide who to reveal to on her own – but Max knew enough about Robin by now to know that she and Billy were even sort of friends. But they hadn't met yet, and Billy was going to be keeping it that way for as long as possible. For his own sanity, at the very least.

"Steve is straight," Billy said, feeling like a broken record as he echoed the knowledge he'd been *certain* in since he'd met the guy back in October. "So we're not going to be 'sucking face', as you've so eloquently put it."

Max frowned, practically pouting. "He might be straight for everyone else," she said, "But he's definitely Billy-sexual, at least."

"That is *not* a thing," Billy said in annoyance.

"He's unquestionably crushing on you," Max declared with absoluteness. "I mean, look how much you guys hang out! And how often are others there? Hardly *ever*. You're practically dating already – you just need to kiss now!"

"He doesn't like me like that, Maxine," Billy told her again. "We're

just friends.”

And then he turned up the volume on his music to drown out any further arguments from his annoying passenger.

It was the first day of February, and still cold as fuck. Billy shivered despite the new coat he’d gotten over Christmas with the money he’d saved up already as well as the money Neil and Susan had given him. (It hadn’t been much, but it was better than nothing – which is exactly what he’d gotten the birthday and Christmas he was twelve.)

It had snowed the day before, but not much and it was still cloudy and windy so it dropped the temperature in the air *a lot*.

But he was sitting with Steve Harrington, because of course he was, and so it wasn’t as miserable as it might have been, considering the fact that he could spend time with some of his favorite company. (He was never going to say that sentence out loud though, because that was embarrassing.)

It was a Friday, and Max had received permission from Neil and Susan to have a sleepover at her friend Jane’s house; after Billy had vouched for her, saying that Jane was the Chief of Police’s daughter, they were practically falling over themselves to get Max out of the house. (Billy was pretty sure Susan was just glad that her daughter finally had an actual *girl* friend, while Neil was just pleased that his family would look better respected to be courting the favor of the Chief of Police. Billy thought it was pathetic, but it helped him too so he hadn’t snarked about it at all.)

After school, Billy had dropped Max off at the cabin, greeting El briefly before he was practically shoved out in favor of “girls only time”. He wasn’t about to go back home though, especially because Neil wouldn’t care where Billy was so long as he picked up Max the next day. Billy basically had a free pass, and so he took advantage of it by telling Steve he was free for the next several hours, that he didn’t have a curfew that night, so they could go and get as high or drunk as they wanted.

And they had – gotten high, that is. But they had run out of weed two hours ago, and were too lazy to go see if Jonathan had more on such short notice. Instead they talked about all the food they wanted to eat right then, but were again too lazy to go and get. They were lying on the hood of the Camaro, staring up at the darkening sky, and Billy had the vague thought that he was going to need to wash his windshield to get rid of the streaks that their movements had left, but at the moment he didn't particularly care.

“I don't know what you're talking about, man, strawberry milkshakes are *infinitely* better than chocolate milkshakes,” Steve insisted, slapping his chest lightly with the back of his hand.

“You're *wrong*, Harrington,” Billy drawled, licking his lips absently. “Chocolate is a *classic*.”

“So is *strawberry*!” Steve practically screeched, waving his hands around wildly. “And it *looks* better in the glass, definitely.” He nodded firmly, like his statement had proven his point unequivocally.

“It's *pink*,” Billy pointed out. “That's a *girl* color.”

“Well, that's sexist,” Steve laughed, shoving him in the shoulder. “And it looks better with the whipped cream and cherry on top! Because they're both shades of red.”

“Haven't you ever heard of *contrast*?” Billy argued, throwing his hands up in the air. “Brown, then white, then red. It's perfect!”

“Oh, and you would know *so* much about contrast, Mister Denim-On-Denim-On-Denim,” Steve scoffed, poking him in the side. Billy resolutely didn't squirm away from the ticklish touch.

“Okay, how about this,” Billy compromised, grabbing Steve's hand to get him to stop poking him. “Chocolate *and* strawberry milkshakes. It's like a chocolate-covered strawberry, then.”

Steve squinted at him suspiciously. “That doesn't sound real,” he accused. “You just made that up.”

“Are you trying to tell me you've never just *mixed* two flavors of milkshake together?” Billy demanded, honestly surprised by Steve's

confusion. He realized then that he was still holding Steve's hand, and quickly released it, pretending the move was casual as he completed the movement by reaching up to ruffle a hand through his own hair. "Thrown Oreos in your chocolate shake? Added caramel to your vanilla one? Heck, even made a Neapolitan."

"Around Valentine's Day the diner drizzles chocolate syrup on the bottom of the milkshake glasses," Steve offered. "And in March they have a mint chocolate chip one for St. Patrick's Day, since it's green."

Billy groaned dramatically, dropping his head against his windshield with a light *thud*. "Not the same thing, pretty boy," he groused. "Ugh, Hawkins needs more culture. You just ask for half chocolate, half strawberry – sometimes they even swirl it together, if they're familiar enough with it. The mix is good."

"Well, I'll have to try it some time," Steve decided with a cute laugh.

"No, no, no – after your complete befuddlement on mixing the two flavors together to make a new one, I don't trust you not to fuck it up somehow on your own," Billy declared. "Tomorrow, we'll go to the diner *together*, and I'll order it *for you*."

"Together, huh?" Steve said musingly, turning his head to look at him, and Billy suddenly realized how that sounded, and his heart began to beat faster in panic, ready to take back the words, to say something snarky to cover it up with – but Steve went on before he could, saying, "Alright, it's a date."

And Billy's heart was beating faster for a new reason altogether, and he had to force himself to stop interpreting Steve's words in the way he *wanted* them to be said. Steve didn't mean like an *actual* date – that was just something people said when they made plans.

"Yeah," he said, wincing mentally when his voice came out like a croak but pressing on regardless, pretending nothing was wrong or different, "I'll come over tomorrow and we can go."

Steve didn't seem to notice that Billy was acting any differently, *thankfully*, and just looked up at the rapidly darkening, cloudy sky and said, "Think it's gonna rain sooner than we thought."

“I’m too stoned to give a fuck about getting a little wet,” Billy said, reaching for that lazy feeling he *should* have with good weed, that had been startled away with his hopeless crushing on the boy next to him.

Steve groaned dramatically. “It’s not just *a little* wet. We’re gonna get soaked, and it’ll be *cold*.” Still, Steve didn’t make any overtures like he was going to budge from his spot on the hood either. “Damn, alcohol sounds good right now. Or popcorn.”

“Both,” Billy proposed with a hum.

“Shit, have you ever had popcorn dipped in your beer?” Steve said, tossing his head back against the windshield and giving a practically *orgasmic* groan at the thought. “That’s what I want right now.”

Billy had to keep thinking of the mental image of beer-soaked popcorn to avoid dwelling on Steve’s groan and what he could sound like in other situations. Forcing disgust into his voice he said, “I can understand popcorn *with* your beer, but *dipped* in it? What the fuck?”

“Okay, so not really dipped in it,” Steve clarified, sitting up and turning so he could look down at Billy still lying against the windshield. His pupils were a little blown with the weed, and he looked excited to share his idea of a “good” recipe. “But like the popcorn is cereal, but then instead of milk you pour the beer over it, and then you eat it with a spoon. It’s *so* good!”

Billy gave him a scandalized look. “You’re giving me shit for a chocolate strawberry milkshake, but you go mixing that kind of shit *on your own*?”

“At least I’m making these decisions while stoned!” Steve protested, laughing and jabbing him in the shoulder with his finger. “You mix your shakes while sober!”

“That’s because it’s a *normal* mixture!” Billy said, grabbing Steve’s hand again as he continued to poke him. (This time though he at least remembered to release him immediately.)

“Oh, don’t try and tell me you’ve never made weird things while

high,” Steve snorted.

“Definitely not,” Billy said primly, despite the fact that he remembered several odd combinations he’d tried before that he’d thought were good ideas at the time. Steve shoved him again in the shoulder, light enough that he didn’t budge a bit where he sat.

“You are so full of *shit*, Hargrove...”

“Oh, *I’m* full of shit?”

“Yeah!”

“At least I’m not eating popcorn like *cereal*...”

“With beer, while *high*, you little shit...”

“Like that makes any difference, pretty boy...”

One minute they were arguing, and then between one moment and the next Steve’s lips were pressed to his. Billy froze with surprise, his initial thought being that he must have finally acted on his thoughts, the ones about how pretty Steve looked always but especially right then, with his eyes bright and movements large like they always were when he got passionate about something, his hair blowing in the wind but not caring because he didn’t care about his hair being perfect when it was just Billy. He thought that he must have just responded automatically to the pretty picture Steve presented, without consent from his brain to do so.

But then he realized that his back was still pressed to the windshield of his car, and his head was still resting on his arm where it was bent behind him, and *Steve* was the one leaning over *him*, was clearly the one who had initiated the kiss, one hand resting on the side of Billy’s jaw, fingertips lightly skimming the skin behind his ear. Steve’s lips were dry but soft, tasted like weed and smoke, and Billy’s heart fluttered because he’d never thought he would get to experience *this*.

And Billy was selfish, okay? He knew that already, as much as he knew that getting involved with a boy in small-town *Hawkins* was a terrible idea for a multitude of reasons, not the least of which being the fact that Neil would almost certainly find out.

But Billy *wanted*, and he'd been holding himself back from that for *months*, and here Steve was, giving him exactly what he'd longed for, so when Steve began to pull back, apology for his supposed presumption on his lips, Billy didn't have to think about his response. He reached up with one hand, curling his fingers around the hair at the back of Steve's neck where it grew long, and pulled him closer again to return the kiss he'd received in kind.

And Steve *melted* at that, apparently accepting that Billy was just as into this as he was, and their lips slid together in a welcoming kiss as Steve pressed closer, his body a heated line that pressed against Billy's. Steve's fingers tightened in Billy's hair, and Billy groaned inadvertently into the kiss, was rewarded with Steve's teeth biting into his bottom lip, breathing heavy.

One of Steve's legs slotted between Billy's as he settled in impossibly closer, and Billy could feel Steve's own, um – *interest* – against his thigh, matching his own. Reluctantly, he pulled back, because he didn't want this to become a quickie or something, and they should talk about things before going that far; he didn't want to lose the friendship he already had with Steve if the other boy decided that he didn't want this, that he wasn't queer after all. But Steve apparently had the same idea too and pulled his head away at the same time, chest heaving with his breath as he stared down at Billy with wide-blown pupils. Billy swallowed; Steve's eyes tracked the movement before looking back up at him.

"Um," Steve said first, and Billy's heart stuttered at the tone, certain that Steve was going to take it back right then, or brush all of this off as the effects of the weed, despite the fact that they were both totally sober by now with recent events.

But then Steve shocked him completely with his next words, "So...I'm not completely straight."

Despite Billy's surprise, he snorted with amusement at Steve's choice of words, and said, "Yeah, me neither." There was a part of him, deep inside, that was shuddering with horror and fear at coming out to his best friend, certain that he was going to be hurt for baring himself like this, but the greater part of him wanted to trust Steve, trust that he wasn't going to screw him over or use this against him, no matter

what happened.

Steve looked as relieved as he did amused, and he dropped his head so that his face was pressed against Billy's chest, huffing out a laugh that wasn't quite embarrassed. "Robin told me I should just lay one on you *weeks* ago," he said, voice muffled against Billy's shirt. "I didn't think you liked me back though."

Billy blinked at that. "*Robin?*" he repeated. He was going to kill her if she told Steve about his crush on him. Or maybe get her a gift basket.

"Yeah, I've kind of liked you for months," Steve snorted, sounding a bit self-deprecating as he continued, "She said I was super obvious about it, and the only reason you didn't notice was because you were just as dumb."

"*She's* dumb," Billy said reflexively, incredibly maturely.

Steve snorted with another laugh and looked back up at him, eyes dancing. "Look at where we are, Bills, and say that again."

They were still together along their fronts, although Steve had moved a little so that his knees were on the car on either side of Billy's leg, so that their *excitements* weren't insistently pressing into each other any longer. Billy realized that one of his hands was wrapped around one of Steve's, held to his chest, the other one still around the back of his neck while Steve used his free hand to brace himself against the car to keep some of his weight off of Billy.

Billy opened his mouth to retort, but before he could he was startled by a wet splat right in the middle of his forehead. Blinking, he looked up at the sky, even as he began to hear the *plink* of raindrops hitting the car, the softer patter against the gravel ground.

He looked back at Steve; neither of them moved, apparently waiting for the other to decide.

"It's gonna pour," Billy said – an out, if Steve wanted it.

But Steve shrugged a little, even as the rain began to increase around and over them. "I don't care," he decided. "You?"

In response, Billy pulled Steve's face back down to his with the hand still on the back of his neck, pressing their lips together again. And it was cheesy, the way Steve smiled into the kiss so much that it was broken, or the way Billy did the same thing moments later, but Billy just felt so incredibly happy and *lucky* that he couldn't help it.

Billy didn't feel the cold of the late winter; he didn't think Steve did either. They warmed each other up well enough, despite the wind, or the cold metal of the Camaro's hood beneath them, or the rain pouring down in cacophonous sheets over them. They made out long after the rain had soaked them both all the way through.

Billy was *totally* getting Robin a gift basket.

Author's Note:

(The next day, Billy and Steve go to the diner and have those chocolate strawberry milkshakes. They consider it their first official date, despite not having intended it to be so originally the day before. It becomes a tradition for their anniversary even years later, to get chocolate strawberry milkshakes. Popcorn-beer cereal never makes it to tradition status, but Billy still gives Steve shit every time he does it.)

This is not the end of the series, I promise! I expect about five or six more? I know where it ends - it just depends on how detailed I get in the interim. But I'm so glad they're finally established! Also that Robin totally brought them together. I love her so much.

Thank you for reading! Let me know what you thought! <3